Are Respiratory Protection Standards Protecting Worker Health Against Ultrafine Diesel Particulate Matter Emissions? An Australian Perspective.

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Background
- Respiratory protective devices are commonly used to protect workers from exposure to ultrafine diesel particulate matter.
- Diesel engine emissions are known to cause lung cancer, cardiovascular and irritant effects.
- Current standards to evaluate penetration through respirator filter media do not consider ultrafine diesel particles.

Objective
Evaluate penetration of diesel emissions through a range of commonly used respirators (8 filter models) by:
- mass of Elemental Carbon (EC) and
- particle number count.

Method
- Emissions from a Detroit D706 LTE diesel engine were fed into an experimental chamber.
- The respirator filters were mounted inside the chamber.
- Particle number count was measured using a TSI Engine Exhaust Particle Sizer (EEPS) (5.6 – 560nm).
- Elemental Carbon (EC) was sampled by NIOSH 5040.
- Penetration = Concentration after filter / Concentration before filter × 100%

Preliminary Results for an example P2 certified filter (AS/NZS1716)
- Pre Filter EC concentration was set at 1 mg/m³, the rated protection factor of the filter (M=1.6mg/m³, SD=0.5, 95% UCL=2.3, n=5). Flow rate through filter was 95L/min (the upper limit specified in AS/NZS1716).
- Elemental Carbon penetration averaged 1.1% (SD=0.3, 95% UCL=1.5, n=5).
- Penetration by particle number count (25.5-560nm) averaged 3.1% (SD=0.5, 95% UCL=3.7, n=5).
- AS/NZS1716 specifies that penetration for P2 filters (measured using NaCl as the challenge aerosol) should not exceed 6%.

Conclusions
- Mean penetration measured as both elemental carbon and particle number count was below 6% for the example filter.
- These results vary dependant on filter model tested.
- Initial data demonstrates that for some commonly used respirator filters penetration may exceed 6% at selected particle diameters, for some filter models.
- This may lead to inhalation of these particles by exposed workers.
- These small particles may contribute to increased cardiovascular mortality and morbidity associated with diesel engine emissions (Martineili, Olivier & Girelli 2013), as well as other adverse health impacts.

The absence of an occupational exposure guideline with respect to particle number count requires further investigation to determine whether the study results pose an additional health risk to workers.

Limitations and Future Work
- Further investigation is required to understand the variation in penetration results for some particle diameters. This may be due to differing sampling conditions for example temperature and humidity levels inside the experimental chamber.

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Selected References
